



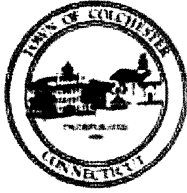
**Town of Colchester, Connecticut**  
127 Norwich Avenue, Colchester, Connecticut 06415

Bernie Dennler, First Selectman

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**Board of Finance  
Meeting Minutes  
Wednesday, January 10, 2024 @ 7:00 PM  
Hybrid: Town Hall – Meeting Room 1 & Via Zoom**

1. Call to order and Roll Call
  - a. Scott Chapman, Chair, called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM
  - b. BOF Members Present: John Thomas, Scott Chapman, Tim Vaillancourt, Mike Hayes, Mike Egan, Karen Belding
  - c. BOF Members absent: none
  - d. Others present: Bernie Dennler (First Selectman)
2. Pledge of Allegiance
3. Correspondence
  - a. None
4. Minutes Review
  - a. Motion to approve made my M. Hayes; second by M. Egan. No discussion. Motion carried with all approving.
5. Citizens Comments
  - a. Chris Rivers, Cambridge Court. 1) Board of Ed been working on getting WJJMS bonding refunds back from the state; been working with state and it is not actively in the audit phase and progress being made. Discussed amounts and how/where it will return to on the town side when it comes through. 2) High level info about the magnet school proposal made by Amy Begue at the BOE meeting since it will eventually become a financial consideration if it progresses. Gave basic high level points and indicated more details are available in the BOE meeting materials.
  - b. Mike Dubreuil, Woodbine Road. 1) Regarding Dec 14 meeting minutes, there was conversation by BOF members pertaining to the 2% calculation that made the fire breathing apparatus vote not require a referendum was alluded to, but he'd like to see the actual percentage calculation stated not just that it was below the 2% threshold. 2) Meeting minutes should include who they were submitted by.
  - c. Deanna Bouchard, Colchester, CT. 1) Meeting minutes noted that board members from multiple boards were invited by fire chief to an exercise, but everyone needs to be aware that if town business is being discussed and quorum rules are met without it being properly noticed can break the rules and result in fines, etc. Make sure boards are aware of the laws. 2) Nice to hear comments about magnet schools, but the proposition needs to be put in front of the town. I've heard there is a working committee on this, but those meetings are not happening formally following FOIA and again that can results in fines and other impacts if not properly followed. Everyone should be educated.
6. Budget tentative calendar review
  - a. All materials related to conversation were loaded to the meeting agenda page on the website so those attending could reference online.
  - b. J. Thomas noted calendar month pages were missing Board of Finance regular meeting in two months.
  - c. M. Egan referred everyone to the 'Budget Information' – 'Budget Development Process' document as informational related to the Colchester budget development process.
  - d. M. Egan reviews some of the basic steps – such as the Board of Finance creating and publishing an expected schedule of budget related events in January, February will begin the budget forums (before we



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actually get the budgets presented). Some of the logistics are discussed further. Further walk-through of the tentatively proposed schedule. Stated that one of the goals for this year is to schedule it so that there is time to do a first referendum and build in time to do a second referendum still before operational budget year begins.

- e. S. Chapman stated that as a board we are targeting a schedule where budgets are in place before new operational year begins. Noted that the tentative dates are an attempt to align activities to efficiently use the existing Board of Finance meetings.
- f. B. Dennler noted that with the state of the accounting and the work going on in the Finance office currently, he is a little concerned with schedule of presenting the town budget that is in the schedule. There are other priorities that need to happen prior to the draft budget being the priority. Can the tentative budget presentation be pushed out a week at a minimum?
- g. Discussion around how to balance activities and goals between board members and First Selectman.
- h. S. Chapman and B. Dennler agree to continue to work on dates in the tentative calendar prior to 1/24 meeting to find a better fit to bring adjusted calendar back.
- i. M. Egan noted that we should avoid activities week of school spring break to account for public attendee concerns and schedules. Noted some ways certain types of meetings or work have been combined into weeks in the past.
- j. C. Rivers confirmed that Board of Ed is on track to present their budget in accordance to tentative calendar.
- k. T. Vaillancourt asked B. Dennler if the town expenditure reports will be in better shape prior to pre-budget forums. M. Egan confirmed the purpose of those pre-forums are an opportunity for the public to express their budget-related wants and needs prior to both budgets being presented to the Board of Finance. T. Vaillancourt noted that we may need more than 30 minutes for those forums. M. Egan noted that those usually run into a Board of Finance regular meeting, so it can run as long as it needs and regular meeting does not commence until that is complete. B. Dennler noted that developing budget with department heads will not be a problem, but rather the expenditure reports with trending are still being reviewed and fixed. All agreed that while there is no ETA on that activity being done that a firm update on that status prior to forums will be needed.
- l. J. Thomas noted that meeting on Feb 14 should be moved to ensure participation. Group agreed to move in next updated tentative schedule.
- m. K. Belding confirmed that ultimate goal of schedule is so that the referendum dates are still ahead of operational year and therefore as we adjust dates to fit, that does not mean moving the referendum dates out to allow for it. Group agreed that the tentative referendum dates do make sense and now it's critical to figure out all the different pieces of the schedule and how to fit them in with other board meetings, with all required notices, town meetings, etc.
- n. K. Belding suggested we create a schedule that has all budget-related events in one view – inclusive of Board of Ed, Board of Selectman, Board of Finance, town meetings, etc. that are budget-related to make it straight forward and also attempt to make it possible to attend all events.

## 7. Board Liaison Assignments

- a. Reviewed list of boards and commissions and discussed which ones had liaison in the past.
- b. Group discussed and agreed on which ones this board would cover
- c. S. Chapman asked the board to consider based on schedules to consider what each member could volunteer to serve as liaison for. M. Egan will do Board of Education; T. Vaillancourt will do Board of



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Selectman; S. Chapman will do Commission on Aging; K. Belding will do Park & Rec Commission; T. Vaillancourt will do at least some of Senior Center Building Committee;

d. Still to figure out: Youth First, Norton Park; TBD at next meeting for assignments

## 8. Department Updates

### a. Finance Department

- i. B. Dennler thanked everyone for participating in the special joint meeting.
- ii. Introduced Michelle Marceau – deputy director of town finance and is currently acting finance director. Michelle stated that her first priority is to work with Maggie and address any identified issues in financial records and then to also get the W2 paperwork for town employees executed.
- iii. B. Dennler noted that they met with department heads to create lists of any corrections or items of concern so that they can be methodically investigated and addressed, while also keeping the audits progressing as necessary. Department heads are also now working on creating the new budget needs with talking points and bullets to support the reasons, history, etc for discussion. They are also working on method for consistency in information and data between departments to make the reporting and requests more methodical.
- iv. B. Dennler noted that Michelle did also work on the permissions in MUNIS for department heads to fix gaps where not all department heads has the same access.
- v. Further conversations and questions around the kind of consistency being targeted, what the differential in permissions in MUNIS were, etc.

### b. First Selectman Report

- i. No transfers
- ii. Working with department heads and with finance department to make sure training and policy reinforcement are happening
- iii. Noted that the HR position needs to be filled. Beginning interviews now.
- iv. Noted that Public Works will be seeing some impact from storm related overtime. Close to fully, staffed, though, and that's good.
- v. Stated that furnace related problems at town hall and emergency repairs came up. Determining now which fund will pay for that, but not problematic. However, does highlight that a plan for replacing both the furnace and HVAC system need to be figured out in near future as a priority. New gas line was run – so making the switch to use that will be part of that effort. Working with Joe Leone about strategy on potentially revisiting big and scope to do a better job on detailed scoping that might realize savings over prior bid. Will then need to figure out how to fund. More to come. Board members discussed and questioned and ultimately agreed a plan needs to be agreed upon in near future.
- vi. Update given on bonded fire trucks – 3 engines and tower truck on target to deliver by the end of the month and some have been inspected already. The fifth vehicle was supposed to be a tanker, but there is a problem with the company that was contracted to deliver this truck and they noticed that they cannot deliver it. B. Dennler is working with legal counsel on this matter and cannot share many details at this time. Next steps are being evaluated with the goal of getting the town a new tanker truck in a reasonable time frame, with the direction that the solution needs to stay within the original budget. More to come.

## 9. Old Business

- a. S. Chapman summarized items coming out of joint financial meeting.





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- i. M. Egan stated that we as a board need to use our budget workshops to go through department budgets with each head and understand things like outstanding positions, vacancies, and contractual requirements in line items, etc. Each head should be asked consistent questions and present consistent facts, figures, and talking points.
- ii. S. Chapman noted that he was looking to understand better how things like POs and encumbering were working in the recent past versus best practice, etc. However, given the work Michelle and others are now doing, that is on track to be clarified.
- iii. S. Chapman asked that First Selectman help the board to understand where legal action is occurring and likely impacts of that into the next budget year. B. Dennler agreed some type of executive session to brief the Board of Finance would be beneficial. The two will work to confirm a date/time to set that up and how to most efficiently have the right representatives attend with the least amount of billable hours involved.

## 10. New Business

- a. None

## 11. Liaison Reports

- a. Board of Education – M. Egan – 1) Kristina Ngai gave a presentation on the STEM program at WJMS. Very impressive overview of the curriculum for 6, 7, and 8 grades. Check out the full presentation and discussion on the agenda, minutes, and recording of the Board of Education meeting. Noted that the impact the STEM program is having on students choosing STEM programs at Bacon or choosing Bacon over out-of-town options is financially impactful and positive. 2) Overview of the proposed magnet program at Bacon Academy – noted that the programs proposed are things like fire, police, and other trades that are currently not available and this can directly benefit the community. Many more details available in the meeting minutes, recording, and agenda. 3) Indoor air quality state mandates – these are newly being enforced and are not funded. Testing is not being enforced and initial results were actually due this month, although extensions are being granted due to delays and confusion. District has started to plan – but ballpark figures are \$40k per school and state is not providing funding. More to come. 4) Grant program – acknowledged that the Board of Ed has been digging in on getting the grant refunds moving again even though that was not theirs to own and thanked them for doing so. 5) BOE budget report update; everything is within parameters and no concerns, but full details are in minutes and recording.

## 12. Citizens Comments

- a. M. Dubreuil, Woodbine Rd: there are typically 2 documents prepared prior to budget season – the prior year audit and the budget book. Audit is delayed and that is understand, but will there be a budget book? B. Dennler responded that yes they will be creating a budget book with more details, information, and narrative that is more in line with historical artifacts instead of materials from last year.
- b. Deanna Bouchard, Colchester, CT: 1) In the past, in January, the Board of Finance would get a presentation from First Selectman and Superintendent around their goals for the year, an overview, etc. to kick off the budget cycle. Asks that this be brought back even though may be hard to complete in January at this point. 2) Finance department has lost 3 members to the Board of Education and is concerned that there is no documentation of roles and responsibilities between the school finance and the town finance departments and Board of Finance should make sure that is clearly laid out. Lots of contention in last year's process because clear expectations and rules were not articulated. Are we going to ask Board of Education to use MUNIS this year? 3) B. Dennler should not be saying he's 'not talking'



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about something. Also Board of Finance should not be involved in explanations of legal cases outside financial impacts.

13. Adjournment

- a. K. Belding makes motion to adjourn; M. Egan seconds; roll call vote passed unanimously. Adjourned at 8:34 PM.

Submitted By:

Karen Belding

Member, Board of Finance